

Testimony of
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State of California
Little Hoover Commission

Public Hearing on Emergency Preparedness
March 23, 2006

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Commissioners, Distinguished Witnesses, and Members of the Public:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Christopher Godley, and I am the Emergency Services Manager for the County of Marin. I also represent the California Operational Area Coalition. I have served as an emergency manager with local government for eleven years.

I applaud your Commission's continuing proactive role in reviewing and assessing the subject of public safety.

Of the 125 recommendations identified in the White House report on Hurricane Katrina, a great number are simply going to become federal mandates tied to continued grant funding. These federal initiatives will occur with or without California's consent.

Of the other recommendations that could be addressed by the State of California I offer the following comments:

1) *National Preparedness.*

A) Regional Coordination

Under *Lessons Learned*, the report states that "The final structural flaw in our current system for national preparedness is the weakness of our regional planning and coordination structures" (pg. 53). The report further recommends that "DHS should revise the National Performance Goals to require the collaborative development of regional disaster plans ... with the private sector" (pg. 111).

B) Catastrophic Planning

The word 'catastrophic' appears in the text of the report some 127 times. It is important to note that a significant number of lessons learned and the corresponding recommendations address the need to prepare for a catastrophic event. In defining "catastrophe", the federal government focuses on damage, the lack of resources, and the threat to national security i.e. what has happened.

Yet a catastrophe is not simply a matter of scale. What truly differentiates it from a disaster is the loss of ability to manage the response at all. When governments are overwhelmed, staff are scattered, communications fail, and emergency systems fail, that is a catastrophe. When discussing a catastrophe, it may serve better to focus on 'how' rather than 'what'

In the introduction, the report states "Yet Katrina creates an opportunity—indeed an imperative - for a national dialogue about true national preparedness, especially as it pertains to catastrophic events."

This “opportunity” is especially relevant to California. On the eve of the 1906 Great San Francisco Earthquake and with the looming threat of Sacramento levee failure, I strongly suggest that it is time to think big. The State of California must formally identify, analyze and plan for potentially catastrophic events such as a major earthquake, Sacramento levee failure, terrorist attack, nuclear accident or pandemic. As an emergency manager, I plan for the worst and hope for the best – we truly need to start planning for the worst.

C) Emergency Management Organizations

The long unresolved issue of having two emergency management-related organizations in the Governor’s Office must be addressed now. In California, following the example of the federal government, Governor Davis created the California Office of Homeland Security by executive order in 2002. However, California did not take the next step of consolidating response and operational agencies as the federal government did.

This situation with both an Office of Homeland Security and an Office of Emergency Services has created tension and confusion at the state and local levels of government. Roles and responsibilities often overlap, authority is unclear and neither agency has the clear ability to influence other state agencies. This situation has also created additional demands on local emergency managers in terms of administrative requirements and coordination of preparedness and response efforts.

Currently, the Legislative Analysts Office recommends that “the OHS should be established as a division within OES. The Legislature should provide specific statutory authorization for OHS and delineate the Office’s duties and powers (within OES.) Such an approach would make it clear that OES is in charge in case of disaster preparedness and response.” The California Operational Area Coalition endorses this recommendation.

The Marin County Sheriff’s Department has not taken a position on this proposal as there is uncertainty as to whether or not the plan, as currently written, will better enable a response although it clearly offers the opportunity for cost savings.

2) *Logistics and Evacuation.*

Federal initiatives may supersede any State efforts. However, California should focus on special needs populations and the challenges imposed by our great cultural dependence on the automobile.

3) Training, Exercises and Lessons Learned.

The current effort to expand the 2006 Golden Guardian Exercise into a truly statewide event with an earthquake scenario is an excellent first step in developing the exercise programs needed to develop and assess our capabilities to respond to truly major disasters.

This program should become aligned with the ongoing training and exercise programs administered by the Office of Emergency Services and its California Specialized Training Institute.

As there is great deal of discussion regarding the use of military assets in the Katrina report, some consideration should be given to conduct quadrennial exercises with the California National Guard. Because of the limited time available for Guard units to train on state missions, this could tie into the Golden Guardian program every four years. The National Guard Bureau allowance for civil disturbance training could be consolidated over four years to permit CNG units to participate.

4) Public Health and Medical Support.

This may be the greatest challenge. Integrating medical and public health preparedness efforts into the existing emergency management system poses significant challenges for all involved. It is important to note that although the federal government is ramping up funding and efforts to prepare for a pandemic influenza, the State of California is reducing funding for Department of Health emergency planning positions.

This highlights a key issue in that almost all of the State of California's emergency management effort is federally funded. So California has to dance to the federal tune. If California were to allocate state funding to better support emergency management efforts – such as restoring recent losses in OES staff levels – then California could better address its concerns and not simply have to respond to federal initiatives.

In closing I would like to thank you again for examining these issues and for this opportunity to provide my thoughts to your Commission. As the Katrina Report authors state “We hope that this Report marks the beginning of a truly transformational state of preparedness throughout all levels of our Nation”. I hope the same may be said of California.

I am happy to answer any further questions you might have.